



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
22 November 2022

English only

Commission for Social Development

Sixty-first Session

6–15 February 2023

**Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly:
Priority Theme: Creating full and productive employment and decent work for all as a way of overcoming inequalities to accelerate the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**

Statement submitted by the FEMM Foundation, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

The Fertility Education & Medical Management (FEMM) Foundation offers a knowledge-based health program for women inspired by women's right to be informed participants in their own healthcare and to make voluntary decisions based on options, information, and understanding. The Foundation is dedicated to health education, medical research, and improving reproductive health care to advance women's health. FEMM's work includes health education for women, medical training for doctors, and reproductive health research.

FEMM recognizes that decent work and full and productive employment are essential components to the world's recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Though societies, economies and families continue to bear the consequences of the pandemic, the world is now at a unique moment where systems can be evaluated and improved. Now is the moment to ask how we can put the authentic needs of human beings at the center of global responses. For women to flourish at the workplace it is imperative that they have the ability to achieve their highest level of health. For this reason, women's hormonal and reproductive health must no longer be neglected.

From the moment of their first period until menopause, women's levels of progesterone and estradiol fluctuate dramatically. A study in the journal *Frontiers in Public Health* showed that these fluctuations affect the whole body, and particularly the woman's central nervous system. They regulate mood, behavior, and even cognitive abilities. This has an effect on women and girls' performance at school, as well as their ability to participate fully and actively in the workplace. Depending on her age and ovulatory status, a woman requires a very specific hormonal balance. Sometimes this occurs naturally, other times it requires the help of a medical professional.

As our scientific knowledge base of women's fertility increases, so does the conviction that women no longer need to accept menstrual symptoms such as irregular bleeding, pain, depression, mood swings, and weight gain normal phenomena. These are frequently signs of underlying hormonal imbalances and abnormalities. Some of these can be easily rectified, others require extensive treatment and even surgery. Two of these conditions that are under-researched, under-treated and poorly understood are endometriosis (found in about 10% of reproductive aged women and girls) and polycystic ovary syndrome (present in 4%–20% of reproductive aged women). There is a need for earlier diagnosis of the former, which at its most chronic state causes infertility. Early diagnosis and treatment of the latter can reduce the risk of contracting serious complications like heart disease and type 2 diabetes. FEMM researchers have taken these findings seriously and have re-examined women's health education and medical systems.

FEMM knows that hormones are essential to reproductive and overall women's health. Ovulation is the sign of health in women because it is the proof of sufficient hormone levels in the nine essential hormones that influence women's health. FEMM researchers have developed better diagnostic criteria to identify conditions that are currently treated mainly at the symptomatic level and instead they treat them at the root. They are even discovering links with conditions not typically considered related to reproductive health like coronary heart disease and Type 2 diabetes which are linked to abnormal ovulation followed by irregular cycles. FEMM takes a new look at the health of contemporary women in ways that will help them to take charge of their health and thrive in their communities, including their workplaces. Informed decisions lead to healthier decisions, and FEMM's programs are ready to be

incorporated into existing health systems and address the often-ignored health needs of women.

FEMM's Medical Management program trains doctors to diagnose and treat reproductive health problems, with a holistic view of a woman's body that incorporates research on the complex hormonal interactions between different body systems. This interaction, and the intricacy of the hormonal activity in a woman's body, is essential to the experience of health in the entire female body. FEMM has developed innovative protocols that allow doctors to identify underlying problems with precision and treat them effectively. This medical support provides treatments that help women to live healthy lives. These protocols that are being implemented in hospitals and medical practices in Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Costa Rica, Croatia, France, Guatemala, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Kenya, Malaysia, Malta, Mexico, New Zealand, Nigeria, Poland, Portugal, Saint Lucia, South Africa, Spain, Tanzania, Ukraine, and the United States.

FEMM also enables women to make informed choices about family planning. There is a right to adequate family planning and information about reproductive health that is accurate and respects cultural, religious, and ethical beliefs. Programs focused on providing reproductive health commodities often fail to ensure that women have the education needed to understand their bodies and what products they are being offered and may not always respect values. Commodities also run out, whereas knowledge, once acquired, is there to stay, and can be shared freely.

Information-based health education and medical care is uniquely suited to meet diverse women's needs while respecting individual choices and values. FEMM offers reproductive and hormonal education in person and online. This helps women to understand the way various family planning methods work and their potential side effects. It educates women about the science of their bodies, how to identify when they are fertile, and how to achieve or avoid pregnancy. All women, including working women, benefit from this information.

FEMM has developed an app to help women take control of their health. The FEMM App is available free of charge in English and Spanish for both Apple and Android devices. Women who use the FEMM App can track their observations and symptoms to better understand their bodies and health. Just as each woman is different, so are her observations and experiences, which is why the app is completely customizable and available in multiple languages such as English, Spanish, French, Portuguese, and Hungarian, with Croatian, Italian, and Polish versions currently in development. Women can track as much or as little as they like and add symptoms and observations. It also provides insights into what a woman is experiencing in her cycle, can flag potential health concerns and can also connect women with specially trained medical professionals for treatment.

FEMM is low-cost and meets the underlying needs of women. Comprehensive health care for women can now be provided through basic health delivery systems, making this approach to women's health more effective, cheaper to deliver, and providing better health outcomes. This makes FEMM a sustainable way of incorporating advanced endocrinological care into standard healthcare infrastructures. By incorporating this care into other efforts, such as work health insurance programs, we can ensure that this essential care is accessible to women and girls. Indeed, a woman who enjoys the highest level of reproductive health is able to participate fully and actively in her workplace.

FEMM is prepared to address the needs of women through accessible educational programs and cutting-edge medical support. It is ready to share its best practices for how to transform medical systems and work with public and private medical providers to make hormonal and fertility care accessible to all women. The

FEMM Foundation urges this Commission and Member States to promote healthcare that authentically meets the needs of women. This will make it possible for them to thrive at the workplace.
